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SUBJECT: H1N1 - GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES AN "ALMOST" PANDEMIC

¶1. (SBU) Minister of Health Petrit Vasili held a press conference November 19 to declare that Albania is "on the edge of an epidemic spread of the H1N1 virus." He stated that "there is no reason to panic, but citizens should be careful and follow given instructions." Vasili stated that schools will remain open, adding that this decision would be revisited only if the number of patients increases considerably.

¶2. (SBU) To date, the Ministry of Health has taken 1,418 samples from patients, of which 129 have been confirmed H1N1. Almost all cases have been mild to moderate, and only one person is currently hospitalized due to the virus. According to MoH statistics, the vast majority of H1N1-infected patients have been between the ages of 15 and 24. While the MoH has seen a significant rise in confirmed cases in November, the trend has not been outside seasonal trends, according to a MoH report released today. The report also stated that it has acquired sufficient levels of Tamiflu to treat infected patients and that it is currently distributing this medicine to regional hospitals.

¶3. (U) While confirmed cases have been noted in every region of Albania, the majority of cases have been in Tirana and neighboring districts.

¶4. (SBU) On November 20, Post will hold a previously scheduled Emergency Action Committee meeting to discuss Post's preparedness to deal with a potential H1N1 pandemic in Albania.